

ABOUT SELF-INJURY

MYTH #1

Only teenage girls self-injure

FACT

People of all ages, genders, cultures, and backgrounds self-injure. Teenagers may be more emotionally reactive, and have less experience concealing their self-injury, making it more visible.

Historically, research on self-injury included only clinical samples (in which girls are over-represented), or limited the methods of self-injury to cutting (which may be more common among girls)

MYTH #2

People who self-injure are attention seeking

FACT

For most people, self-injury is a means of coping with intense or unwanted emotions, and they go to great lengths to conceal the self-injury

Self-injury is a behavior people find difficult to understand, as it contradicts the basic human instinct to avoid injury. Even if people do self-injure for attention, we have to ask why? A compassionate approach necessitates that we try to understand what is lacking in the person's life (e.g., a sense of connection, affection), and address this underlying need, rather than labeling the person as attention-seeking.

MYTH #3

People who self-injure are suicidal

FACT

The relationship between self-injury and suicidal thoughts and behaviours is complex. While self-injury is usually used as a way to cope with life, rather than to end it, people who self-injure are at increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

People who self-injure are at increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours, so figuring out when a behaviour is motivated by a desire to end life and when it is not can be tricky. Plus, the language we use confuses self-injury and suicidal behaviour. The term 'deliberate self-harm' (or just self-harm), is defined as any self-inflicted damage to the body regardless of suicidal intent. This means any talk of self-harm includes both self-injury and suicidal attempts.

ABOUT SELF-INJURY**MYTH #4**

We are in the midst of a self-injury "epidemic"

FACT

We don't know. To know if more people are self-injuring, we need to conduct large, epidemiological studies, with representative samples, using reliable and valid measures of self-injury, and conduct them over many years. To date, no such studies exist.

It is likely that, partially as a result of self-injury being more publicly visible, more people are willing to talk about self-injury, cultivating the appearance that more people are engaging in the behaviour

MYTH #5

Social media is contributing to self-injury

FACT

Social media represents a double-edged sword when it comes to self-injury. There are several potential benefits associated with online communication about self-injury; there are also some potential risks. There is an opportunity to harness the Internet as a means to reach individuals who self-injure and who may otherwise not seek help or support elsewhere.

There is often a general public perception that social media in the context of risky behaviour is "bad". To this end, much of the media attention concerning the impact of online self-injury communication has focused on the potential risks apart from the potential benefits.